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ABSTRACT

Drawing from data obtained from a two-page student questionnaire mailed to a number of Connecticut English and reading teachers in all types of schools, this paper reports on the reading interests and habits of students in grades four through twelve. Usable responses were received from 3,339 students from 51 schools in 37 different towns and cities. Findings are arranged in the following categories: (1) types of readers, (2) personal reading versus required reading, (3) favorite types of books, (4) favorite books, (5) most recent title read, (6) favorite authors, (7) repeated readings of authors, (8) assigned books, (9) hours of homework per week, (10) hours per week reading outside of school, (11) number of books read outside of class in an average month, (12) hours of television watched in an average week, (13) influence of television and movies on reading, (14) sources of information about good books to read, (15) sources of books, (16) paperbacks versus hardbacks, (17) book purchases, (18) book clubs, (19) places in school where paperbacks can be bought, (20) characteristics of books that appeal to students, (21) number of books owned, (22) what students would buy with an extra eight dollars, (23) records and books purchased during the previous semester, (24) how much students were willing to spend to buy a book, (25) percentages of students whose parents read the same book, (26) parental censorship, and (27) self-censorship. (HOD)

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READING INTERESTS AND HABITS OF CONNECTICUT STUDENTS IN GRADES FOUR THROUGH TWELVE

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March 26, 1984

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READING INTERESTS AND HABITS OF CONNECTICUT STUDENTS IN GRADES FOUR THROUGH TWELVE

Donald R. Gallo

The news media as well as many parents and teachers have maintained that students do not read. In January of 1982 we set out to discover just how how much truth lies behind that belief. With the financial support of H. P. Kopplemann, Inc., a Hartford-based supplier of paperback books for schools and libraries, we mailed questionnaires to a number of English and reading teachers in grades four through twelve throughout Connecticut. We asked each teacher to survey one or two different classes and to ask another teacher in their school to do the same, thereby hoping to get as wide a sampling as possible. We sent the two-page questionnaire to teachers in all types of schools: public, private, parochial, and technical, in urban, rural, and suburban areas. Usable responses came from a total of 3399 students from 51 schools in 37 different towns and cities.

With financial assistance from the Research Foundation of Central Connecticut State University where I teach and with the help of several enthusiastic students, we analyzed the data piece by piece during the past two years. Although we have compiled a considerable amount of important information to this point, we have had neither the time nor the money to analyze several of the complex interrelationships among some of the items. For example, the responses of students in private and parochial schools have not yet been compared to responses of students in public schools; nor have responses of urban students been compared to responses of suburban students. We leave those for the future. At this point, the following findings will serve to reinforce some previous investigations while other findings should serve as guidelines for teachers, administrators, and parents who care what students think and feel.

TYPES OF READERS

As the chart on the next page indicates, the sample of students we obtained was sensibly distributed, with slightly less than half of them identifying themselves as AVERAGE readers. Nearly one-fourth saw themselves as AVID readers and an equal proportion said they were OCCASIONAL readers. Among the boys, about 15% identified themselves as AVID, 40% as AVERAGE, and 36% as OCCASIONAL readers.

TYPES OF READERS (Self-Rating)*

	AVID			AVERAGE			OCCASIONAL			NON-READER		
Grade	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
4-6	26	37	32	44	50	47	25	11	18	5	1	3
7-9	17	26	21	37	47	42	38	25	31	9	2	5
10-12	10	21	16	42	48	46	38	26	32	9	4	6
All	15	25	20	41	48	45	36	24	30	8	3	6

While less than 10% of the students saw themselves as NON-READERS, the proportion of them increased with age, especially among females, though there were more than twice as many males as females in this category. On the other side of the scale, females far outnumbered males in the AVID reader category.

One of the most important things this chart shows is that, as the age of the students increased, the proportion of AVID readers decreased markedly, from 32% in the elementary grades to half that in the high school, with the percent of decrease being much steeper for males than for females.

PERSONAL READING VERSUS REQUIRED READING

Developing the reading ability of students is one of the major goals of any literature program. Exposing students to good literature is another important goal. A less tangible but possibly more significant goal is to develop life-time readers. To do that, teachers need to go beyond teaching students how to read and beyond requiring them to read the best literature from the past; they must provide reading that is enjoyable. For without enjoyment, reading might be only a drudgery for students, and they will having nothing more to do with the subject once there is no longer a teacher present to make them read something.

To determine the level of students' interest in the reading that is required of them, we asked students how books they read on their own differ from books they are assigned to read in English and language arts classes. Among the students

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* Unless otherwise noted, all numbers presented in charts throughout this report are percentages.

who responded to this open-ended item, only about 4% of the males and 3% of the females noted that there was essentially no difference. All of the other students wrote one or more remarks that ranged from "They're in a different language" to "They have something you can sink your teeth into." Several students in each grade said their own books were shorter; some said their own books contained more violence, were more realistic, scarier, or funnier. A number of females indicated that their books were more likely to contain teenagers than were the required readings. But the plurality of students--22% of them--said their own books were more interesting and more exciting. The percentages were somewhat different for males and famales and from grade to grade, though no trend is obvious, as can be seen in the following chart:

PERSONAL READING IS MORE INTERESTING OR EXCITING

GRADE	MALES	FEMALES
6	20	27
7	20	24
8	19	23
9	24	15
10	23	27
11	20	22
12	21	16

(Because so few students responded to this item in grades 4 and 5, percentages for those grades have not been included here.)

Those were the responses for all types of readers. The dissatisfaction with required reading choices was no different for avid readers with superior grades in English. Many of them said that their required reading was "boring," and some also said it was "hard to understand."

Several avid readers in grades nine through twelve criticized the teaching method as opposed to the books themselves: Teachers make you "look too deeply for meaning," one said; or you "have to read slowly in class" complained another; or, said one, "having to analyze everything." One tenth grade boy said: "It isn't the book, its reading one chapter a night to discuss in class." And several avid readers noted: "The fact that you are <u>forced</u> to read it."

But students also criticized the choice of books that are required reading. Besides the general criticisms of "boring" and "dumb" were these:

"The books I read I usually put myself in place of the person I am reading about." (7th, female)

"I learn something from my choices." (8th, male)

"Mine are horror theirs are prissy." (8th, female)

"The books I read on my own you never want to put them down, the ones assigned you never want to pick them up." (9th, female)

Comments such as the following continued through the upper grades:

9th "too dry, historical, old fashioned"
10th "not enough action or emotion"
11th "style is antiquated"
12th "deal with times that are irrelevant"

Three final comments that say a great deal, all from tenth graders:

"English departments are too stuck in their ways. [They] don't change authors or titles."

"They are what the teacher likes, not us."

"The books have nothing to do with me."

We asked for the same information in another way that was more classifiable: **Do you like the novels and other books that you are <u>assigned</u> to read for school? (circle)**
always often sometimes not usually never

Most fourth graders said **usually** or **sometimes**. The number of pleased students decreased from there as their ages increased. In grades 4-6, nearly 5% said **always**; 26% said **usually**; and 42% said **sometimes** (with more girls than boys saying that--48% to 38%). But that left 31% of the boys and 25% of the girls who said **seldom** or **never**! (Only 8% said **never**.)

In grades 7-9, only 1% of the students said they **always** liked the required readings and 17% said **usually** (with girls outnumbering boys 20% to 15%). A plurality of 44% said **sometimes**. But 40% of the males and 35% of the females said **seldom** or **never** (with **never** being circled by 14% of the males and 8% of the females).

In grades 10-12, less than 1% of the students noted **always** and 24% said **usually**. Again here, 41% of the males and 23% of the females said they **seldom** or **never** liked the assigned readings.

While the percentage of favorable responses in the senior high school was slightly better than it was in the junior high school grades, there are nevertheless fully 40% of the students in grades 7-12 who are not enjoying most of the books we require them to read , while only 20% of the students in those same grades **usually** enjoy those books.

The obvious question, therefore, is **What types of books do students like to read?**

FAVORITE TYPES OF BOOKS

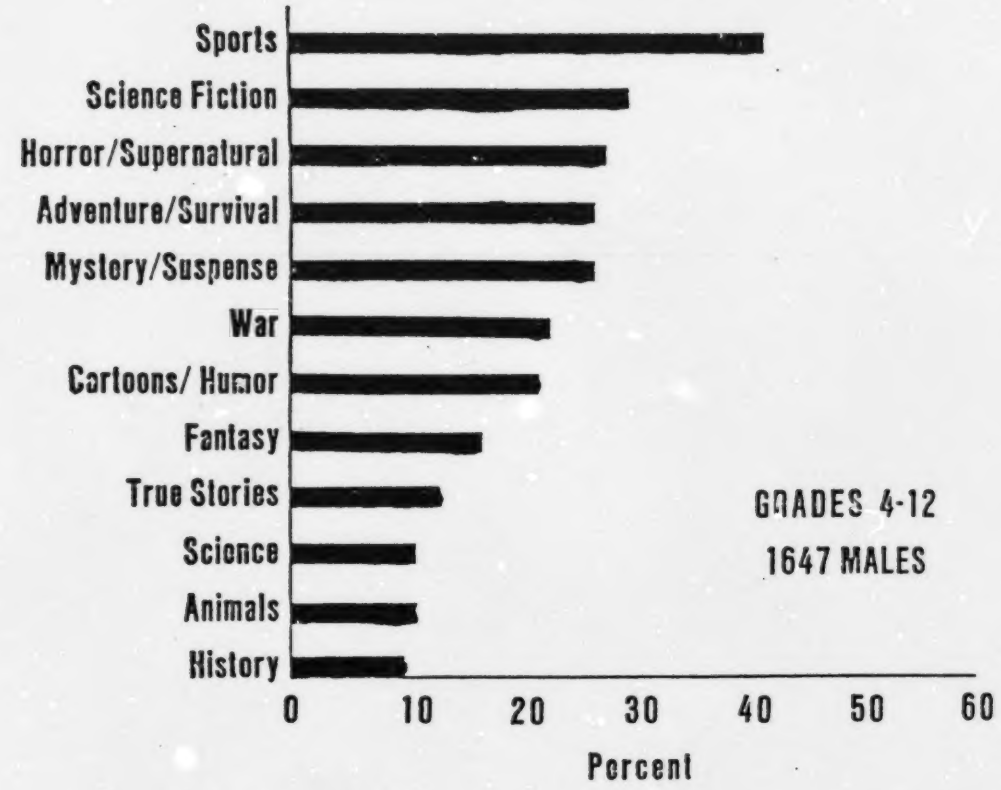
From a list of twenty-five topics, we asked students to circle the three that interested them the most. The charts that follow show how extensive the interest is in romances, mysteries, and sports as well as in other topics that received more than just a few responses.

The importance of romances for females is not very strong in grades 4-6. There, **Romance** is only fourth in importance, with **Problems of Growing Up** first, followed by **Animals** and **Mystery/Suspense**. Romances take on their fullest importance in grades 7-12 where 57% of the girls noted that as a favorite topic for reading.

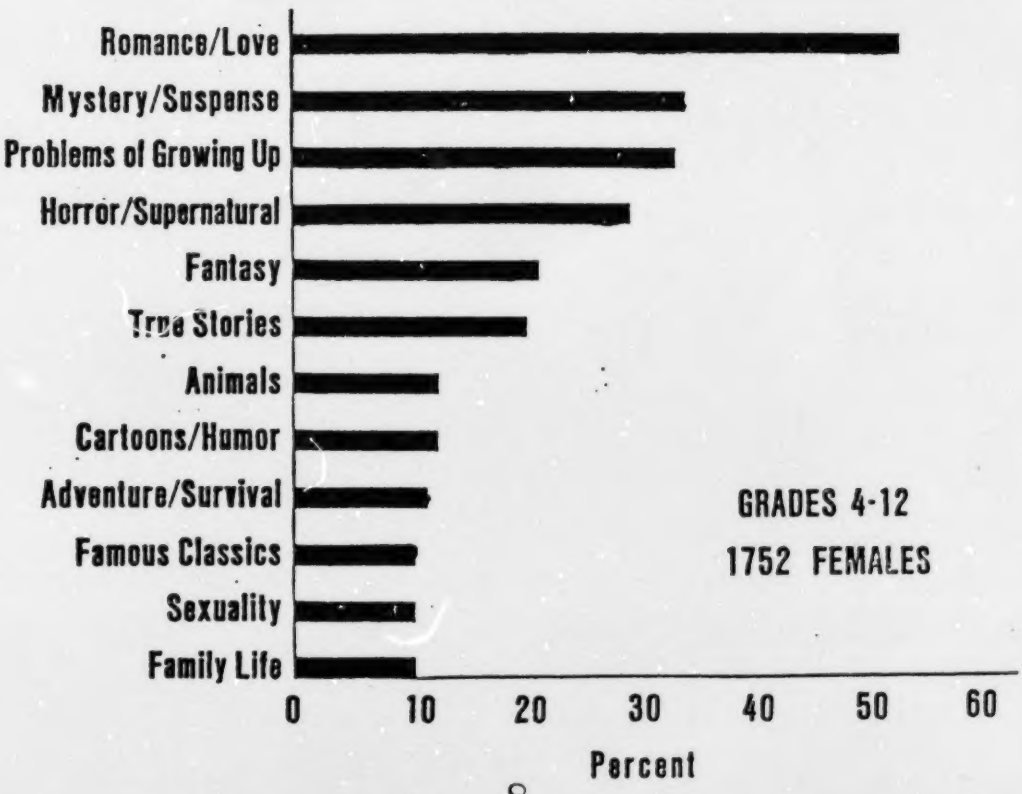
For boys, **Sports** reigns at the top of the list in all three grade level groupings, though the gap between **Sports** and whatever is in second place is greatest in grades 4-6 where **Sports** was noted by 48% of the boys and **Horror/Supernatural** by 31%.

If schools expect to attract as many students as possible to literature, these findings suggest that teachers would be wise to include mysteries and horror stories as well as fantasies for both boys and girls, along with a romance for the females and a sports story for the males in class.

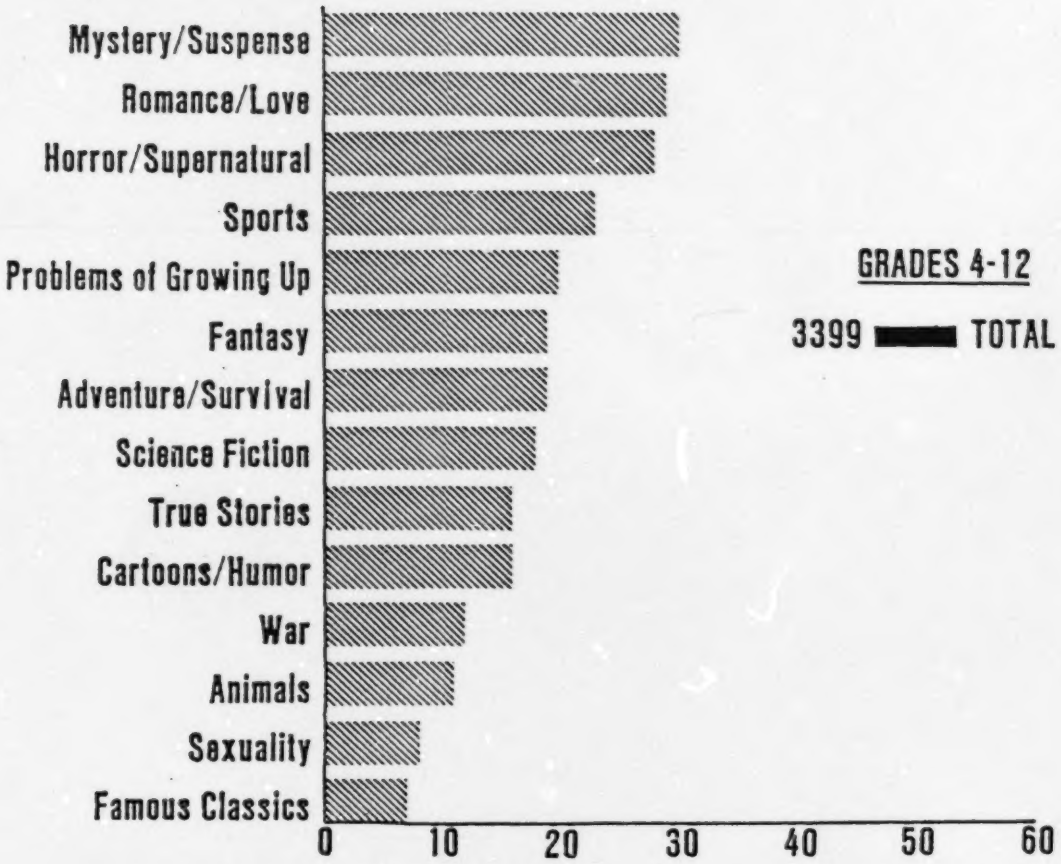
FAVORITE TYPES OF BOOKS



FAVORITE TYPES OF BOOKS



FAVORITE TYPES OF BOOKS



FAVORITE BOOKS

If those are the favorite types of books, what are students' favorite books? We asked students to list the best books (up to three titles) they had read during the previous two years. From those responses, we compiled the most frequently mentioned titles for each grade.

The most important observation is that there were very few titles that were mentioned by more than a few students, with the exception of Judy Blume's books in the elementary grades. Variety is therefore the most dominant quality of students' reading--in all grades. Below, by grade, are the most frequently mentioned titles and the percentage of students noting each title.

GRADE	TITLE	PERCENT
4	Superfudge	30
5	Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret	18
6	Superfudge	7
7	Where the Red Fern Grows	7
8	Flowers in the Attic	7
9	Flowers in the Attic	8
10	The Outsiders	7
11	To Kill a Mockingbird	8
12	Of Mice and Men	5

In the elementary grades, the top three titles in grade 4, the top five titles in grade 5, and five of the top six titles in grade 6 were written by Judy Blume. In grades 8 and 9, Flowers in the Attic was not only the most popular title; it was there almost exclusively because of its popularity among females. In fact, in grades 7-12, 11% of the females noted that as their favorite book. (Another 8% noted Petals on the Wind, while 4% noted If There Be Thorns, V.C. Andrews' sequels to Flowers in the Attic.) Among males, The Outsiders held top position throughout grades 8-10; Of Mice and Men took over first place for males in grades 11 and 12.

MOST RECENT TITLE READ

Variety dominated also in the list of the most recent books students said they had read for their own enjoyment. The list contained everything from trash to the classics, with very few of the same titles being read by students in each grade.

GRADE	TITLE	PERCENT
4	Superfudge	9
5	(none mentioned by more then one student)	-

GRADE	TITLE	PERCENT
6	Big Red	1
	The Outsiders	1
7	Where the Red Fern Grows	3
8	Forever	2
	The Outsiders	2
9	The Amityville Horror	2
	Flowers in the Attic	2
	The Pigman	2
10	No One Here Gets Out Alive	1
11	The Crucible	3
12	No One Here Gets Out Alive	2

Because many teachers and parents often worry that their children are stuck in a reading rut that they will never get out of without the insistence of adults, it is important to observe in the preceding two lists the growth in reading maturity throughout the grades, starting with typical books for younger readers, passing through the contemporary suspense or adventure book, focusing on teenage problems, getting absorbed in contemporary issues and personalities, and moving naturally into contemporary classics. That same growth can be seen below in the students' list of their favorite authors.

FAVORITE AUTHORS

It was surprising that many students did not list the name of a favorite author. It is also surprising that there was not a great variety in the names of the authors that were noted, as there had been in the listing of favorite titles. (The figures below are numbers of students noting that name, not percentages.)

FAVORITE AUTHORS

GRADE	MALES		FEMALES		BOTH	
4	BLUME	39	BLUME	57	BLUME	96
	CLEARY	13	CLEARY	28	CLEARY	41
	CHRISTOPHER	9	SILVERSTEIN	6	CHRISTOPHER	9
					SILVERSTEIN	6

GRADE	MALES		FEMALES		BOTH	
5	CHRISTOPHER	9	BLUME	33	BLUME	40
	BLUME	7	CLEARY	9	CLEARY	10
	DIXON	5	KEENE	7	CHRISTOPHER	10
6	BLUME	20	BLUME	97	BLUME	117
	CHRISTOPHER	10	CLEARY	24	CLEARY	31
	HITCHCOCK	9	DANZIGER	10	HITCHCOCK	11
	TOLKEIN	9				
7	BLUME	22	BLUME	83	BLUME	105
	TOLKEIN	16	CLEARY	11	TOLKEIN	19
	HITCHCOCK	7	CHRISTIE	10	CLEARY	12
					HITCHCOCK	12
8	HINTON	19	BLUME	80	BLUME	86
	KING	11	ANDREWS	23	HINTON	36
	BRADBURY	9	HINTON	17	KING	24
	STEINBECK	9				
9	TOLKEIN	24	BLUME	82	BLUME	87
	HINTON	18	KING	26	KING	35
	STEINBECK	14	ANDREWS	23	TOLKEIN	29
10	POE	21	BLUME	65	BLUME	72
	HINTON	19	KING	32	KING	42
	TOLKEIN	16	STEINBECK	24	HINTON	41
			ANDREWS	24		
11	TWAIN	15	BLUME	31	BLUME	31
	STEINBECK	14	POE	18	POE	30
	POE	12	CHRISTIE	16	STEINBECK	23
12	STEINBECK	24	STEINBECK	22	STEINBECK	46
	TOLKEIN	19	KING	19	KING	27
	POE	15	STEELE	16	TOLKEIN	25
	SHAKESPEARE	12	BLUME	15	DICKENS	24
	DICKENS	9	CHRISTIE	15	SHAKESPEARE	23
			DICKENS	15		

Not only did relatively few authors' names come up again and again, there was little change throughout the grades. Most astounding is the dominance of Judy Blume from grade four through grade eleven. No other author comes even close to her popularity. The observable changes that do occur, nevertheless follow the same pattern as that which was discussed at the conclusion of the previous section on favorite titles, beginning with an expected dominance of children's authors and concluding with a balance of contemporary and classical authors, including Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare.

REPEATED READINGS OF AUTHORS

While many students have favorite authors, the importance of an author's name on a book is not as great as we expected it to be. And whatever appeal a special name has for students in the early grades, that importance diminishes as students get older. We asked If you enjoy reading a book, how often do you try to find and read another book by the same author? As the next chart shows, more than half of the elementary students indicated ALWAYS or OFTEN. Girls were more likely than boys to do so.

Percent who ALWAYS or OFTEN read another book by same author

Grades	Males	Females	Both
4-6	51	57	54
7-9	35	46	41
10-12	25	43	34

Percent who NEVER read another ...

4-6	9	5	7
7-9	18	4	11
10-12	21	6	13

The percentage of students who NEVER read another book by the same author was relatively small among females at all three grade levels, but it increased to a considerable proportion among boys in high school--one out of every five.

ASSIGNED BOOKS

Just as variety dominated the lists of favorite books that students had read on their own, variety dominated the lists of best liked and most hated assigned books. Several books nevertheless stood out in both the best and the worst categories; the top vote getters are noted below. (The figures in this chart are numbers of students noting that title, not percentages.)

ASSIGNED BOOKS

Grade	Best	Worst
4	Secret Garden 17	——— ———
5	Sounder 10	——— ———
6	My Brother Sam Is Dead 32	A Wrinkle in Time 15
7	Where The Red Fern Grows 13	The Light in The Forest 15
		Johnny Tremain 15
8	Cheaper By The Dozen 18	The Light in The Forest 19
	The Hound of The Baskervilles 18	
9	The Outsiders 54	Johnny Tremain 15
10	Romeo and Juliet 77	Romeo and Juliet 44
11	Macbeth 29	The Scarlet Letter 22
12	The Scarlet Letter 39	The Scarlet Letter 18

It must be noted that several of those titles did not make the top of the charts because they were well liked or strongly disliked in a number of schools; rather, certain books gained a lot of responses it seemed because several students in one school or in one particualr classroom enjoyed them, or, conversely, a whole group in another classroom or in another school hated that assigned book. Thus, in some cases it may not have been the book itself that was the culprit; rather, the choice of that book for a particular audience may have been inappropriate (as, for example, The Scarlet Letter might have been for a group of less than competent readers assigned it in the eleventh grade), or the teaching of that book might have been less than inspiring (as, for example, might have been the case with The Light in the Forest in the eighth grade).

HOURS OF HOMEWORK PER WEEK

As is to be expected, students in the elementary grades did less homework than students in the higher grades, with the average student in grades 4-6 doing between 3 and 6 hours a week, while the average student in the secondary grades did between 6 and 10 hours a week. Differences between males and females were not very large in grades 4 through 9, though females did more homework than males did. The difference between females and males is greatest in the high school, where girls did far more homework than boys did, as can be observed in the following chart.

MORE THAN 10 HOURS PER WEEK

GRADE	MALES	FEMALES	BOTH
4-6	3	6	5
7-9	16	22	20
10-12	16	31	23

About 3% of the males and 4% of the females in grades 10-12 reported doing more than 20 hours of homework a week. At the other end of the scale can be seen a greater percentage of males doing little or no homework as compared to girls in the same grades.

TWO HOURS OR LESS PER WEEK

GRADE	MALES	FEMALES	BOTH
4-6	33	29	31
7-9	19	16	17
10-12	27	14	21

As that chart shows, nearly one out of every four males in grades 7-12 had very little or no homework in an average week. (Actually 8% of the males as compared to 3% of the females in grades 10-12 who answered this item said they had NO homework in an average week.)

HOURS PER WEEK READING (IN ADDITION TO SCHOOL WORK)

According to their own estimates, the average student in our survey read between three and five hours a week in addition to school assignments, with students in the elementary grades reading slightly less than students in the secondary grades. Girls, as might be expected, seemed to spend slightly more time reading independently than did boys. Unlike the responses to other items in this survey, there was very little difference between junior and senior high school students in general on this item, except that a larger proportion of junior high school students did no additional reading (more boys than girls), as can be viewed in the chart below.

HOURS PER WEEK READING OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

	0			1-2			3-5			6-10			11+		
GRADE	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
4-6	4	5	4	30	30	30	29	23	26	24	26	25	13	17	15
7-9	12	6	9	34	25	29	26	36	32	19	19	19	9	14	12
10-12	8	5	6	34	27	31	31	34	33	18	23	21	9	11	11
ALL	9	5	7	34	27	30	29	33	31	19	22	21	9	13	11

In contrast to the 5% to 9% of the students who said they read nothing beyond school assignments, an equal proportion of boys and more than twice the proportion of girls said they read more than ten hours in an average week, as can be observed in the last column on the right. About 2% of all students reported reading in excess of twenty hours a week beyond school assignments.

NUMBER OF BOOKS READ OUTSIDE OF CLASS IN AN AVERAGE MONTH

Students in the lower grades reported reading more books on their own than did students in higher grades, with the number of books decreasing as age increased. The mode in grades 4-6 was 3-5 books a month (39%), with the second largest group reading 1-2 books a month (25%). In all other grades the mode was in the 1-2 books a month category, for

both males and females. In grades 7-9, 87% of the students reported reading at least one book a month, while 43% reported reading more than three. In grades 10-12, 78% read one or more books, while 26% reported reading three or more.

Girls, as in almost all other studies, read more than boys in the secondary grades, but in grades 4-6 as many boys as girls said they read more than ten books a month (14%), and more boys than girls said they read between six and ten books a month. Boys were far more likely than girls to read nothing: 23% of the boys and 10% of the girls reported reading no books in an average month, with the percentages of non-readers increasing with age so that 30% of the boys and 15% of the girls in grades 10-12 reported reading virtually no books outside of school requirements.

On the positive side, in grades 7-9, 8% of the boys and 22% of the girls reported reading six or more books in an average month, and in grades 10-12, 4% of the boys and 7% of the girls reported doing so.

HOURS OF TELEVISION WATCHED IN AVERAGE WEEK

The average elementary school and junior high school student in our survey watched between ten and twenty hours of television in an average week. The average senior high school student watched slightly less than ten hours, possibly because a large proportion of those studens held jobs after school, evenings, and weekends.

Overall, one-fourth of all students in the survey estimated that they watched TV for five hours or less each week; one-fourth watched between six and ten hours; and another one-fourth watched between eleven and twenty hours a week. Girls generally watched less television than did boys at all grade levels. About 3% of the students said they usually did not watch television.

HOURS OF TV WATCHED IN AVERAGE WEEK

	0-5			6-10			11-20			21-30			31+		
GRADE	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
4-6	17	23	20	18	19	18	27	25	26	20	15	17	18	19	18
7-9	13	19	16	23	23	23	25	27	26	17	16	17	21	15	18
10-12	28	35	32	26	28	27	27	22	24	12	9	10	8	6	7
ALL	20	28	24	24	25	24	26	24	25	15	12	14	15	11	13

At the high end of the scale, our study showed that about 8% of the males and 5% of the females were watching more than forty hours of TV a week, with higher percentages in the elementary and junior high schools than in the high schools.

Nevertheless, these findings contrast markedly with previously published reports of extensive TV viewing by American students which have indicated that most children watch in excess of thirty hours a week. If students' own estimates can be trusted (and we have no reason to suspect that their responses to this item are any less reliable than their responses to any other items on this survey), then we can conclude that 90% of Connecticut students in grades four through twelve at the time of this survey watched less than thirty hours of television in an average week, with three-quarters of them watching twenty hours or less, and nearly one-half of them watching ten hours or less each week.

It is encouraging to discover that while the average secondary school student in Connecticut is spending between six and ten hours a week on homework and watching about ten hours of televison each week, he or she still finds time to do five or six hours of independent reading a week. And although 9% of the students in grades four through nine may be watching more than forty hours of television a week, at least that same proportion of boys and nearly twice as many girls are spending more than ten hours a week reading on their own.

INFLUENCE OF TV AND MOVIES ON READING

A lot has been said during recent years about the negative influence of television and movie viewing on the reading habits of students. As a previous item in this report indicates, quite a significant number of students were reading books in addition to viewing television. In order to further determine the relationship between books and films, we asked students if they had read any books as a result of viewing a film or if they had been influenced by their reading of a book to then see the film of that story.

Our survey indicates that students were more likely to read a book because they had seen the film than to want to see the movie after they had read the book. Also, theater movies appear to have had more influence than did movies that had appeared on television.

Nearly half of the students in our survey noted one or more books that they had read as a result of having viewed the film version. In some grades as few as 30% or as much as 66% of the students had done so.

As might be expected, blockbuster movies led the list, starting with **Jaws**, **Star Wars**, and **The Amityville Horror**. (Remember that this survey was conducted in early 1982.) A total of 245 students (7.2% of those surveyed) said they had read **Jaws** as a result of having seen the movie in a theater. (A smaller proportion read the book after seeing it on TV.)

Although **Jaws** was in first place with the boys (10% of them had listed it), it was in second place with the girls. For girls, **The Amityville Horror** took first position, with 100 of the females (5.7%) listing that title; it was in third place overall. **Star Wars** took second place mainly because of its popularity with males; it was in fourth place with the females. More than 9% of the boys noted that title. In third place for females was **Endless Love**, a title never mentioned by boys, and one that did not appear on the list until eighth grade. Following those top four titles were **The Empire Strikes Back**, **Rocky**, and **Raiders of the Lost Ark**. Obviously boys were more interested in reading books based on science fiction films and girls were more attracted to horror stories.

Although books and films of these limited types do dominate, hundreds of students in our survey listed all kinds of books they had been inspired to read because of a film they had seen. Those titles that were mentioned by several students are listed below by grade levels.

GRADES 4-6

The Black Stallion
Superman
Snowbound
Charlotte's Web
The Phantom Tollbooth
Halloween

GRADES 7-9

The Hobbit
Gone With the Wind
Grease
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
Ice Castles
Halloween
Of Mice and Men
Ghost Story
Lord of the Flies
Shane
Sooner or Later
Salem's Lot
Kramer vs. Kramer
The Shining
Mom, the Wolfman, and Me
Benji
The Exorcist
A Separate Peace
Love Story

GRADES 10-12

Superman
Shogun
Close Encounters of the Third Kind
The Exorcist
A Tale of Two Cities
Romeo and Juliet
To Kill a Mockingbird
Summer of My German Soldier
Gone with the Wind
Ice Castles
The Other Side of the Mountain
Carrie
Of Mice and Men
The Shining
The Deep
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
2001: Space Odyssey
The Hobbit
Huckleberry Finn
Coma
Love Story
Sooner or Later
Kramer vs. Kramer
Halloween
Grease
Mommie Dearest

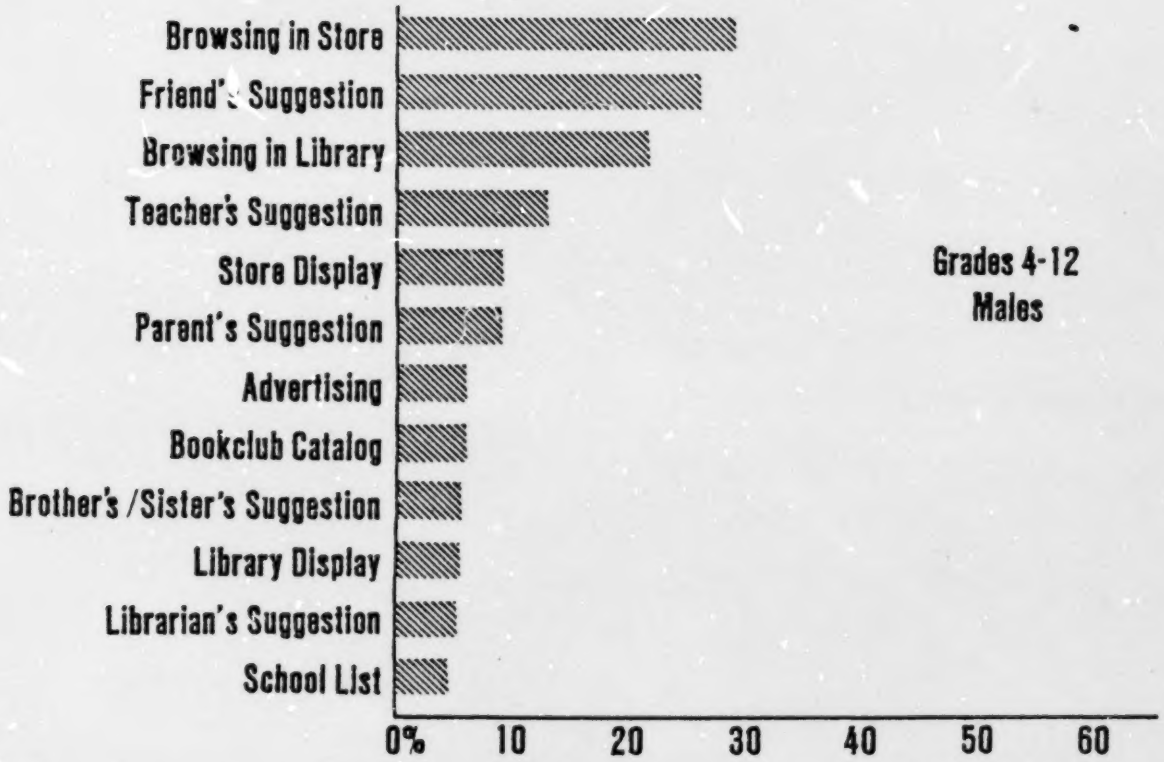
Other titles mentioned by two or more students though not by many included: Herbie the Love Bug, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Old Yeller, Where the Red Fern Grows, Dracula, Lord of the Rings, Scruples, Fahrenheit 451, The Towering Inferno, The Great Gatsby, Moby Dick, The Godfather, Helter Skelter, Brian's Song, Westside Story, Ivanhoe, Roots, Wuthering Heights, Centennial, Macbeth, Ordinary People, The Promise, Taming of the Shrew, Forever, The Best Little Girl in the World, The Scarlet Letter, and All Quiet on the Western Front. A wide variety, indeed.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

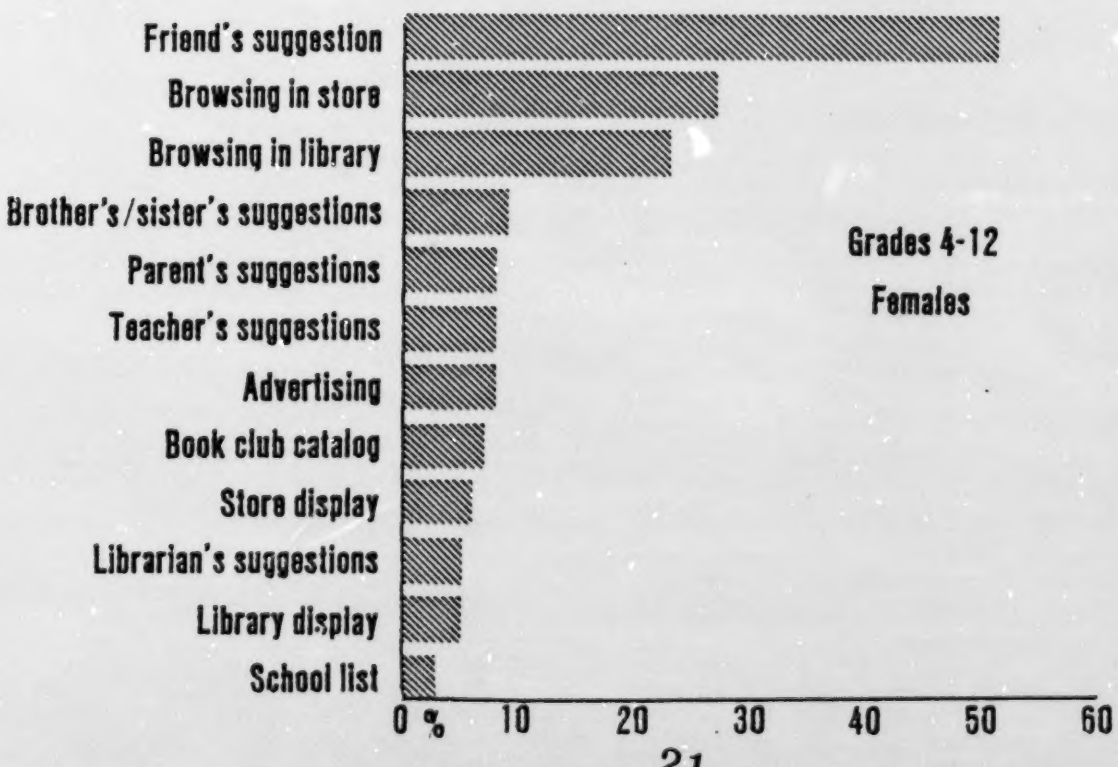
From where or whom are students most likely to hear about good books to read? As has been true in the past, FRIENDS are the main source for most students, though more so for girls than for boys. For boys, BROWSING IN A STORE is the main course, with FRIENDS second and BROWSING IN THE LIBRARY in third place.

At all grade levels, boys appear to be more likely to read a book based on a teacher's suggestion than are girls. Girls are more likely to follow the guidance of a sibling than are boys. Book clubs are an important source of ideas for books for elementary students, though their influence decreases dramatically in the secondary schools. (More details about book clubs will appear later in this report.) School recommended reading lists seem to be of little value, according to the students we surveyed.

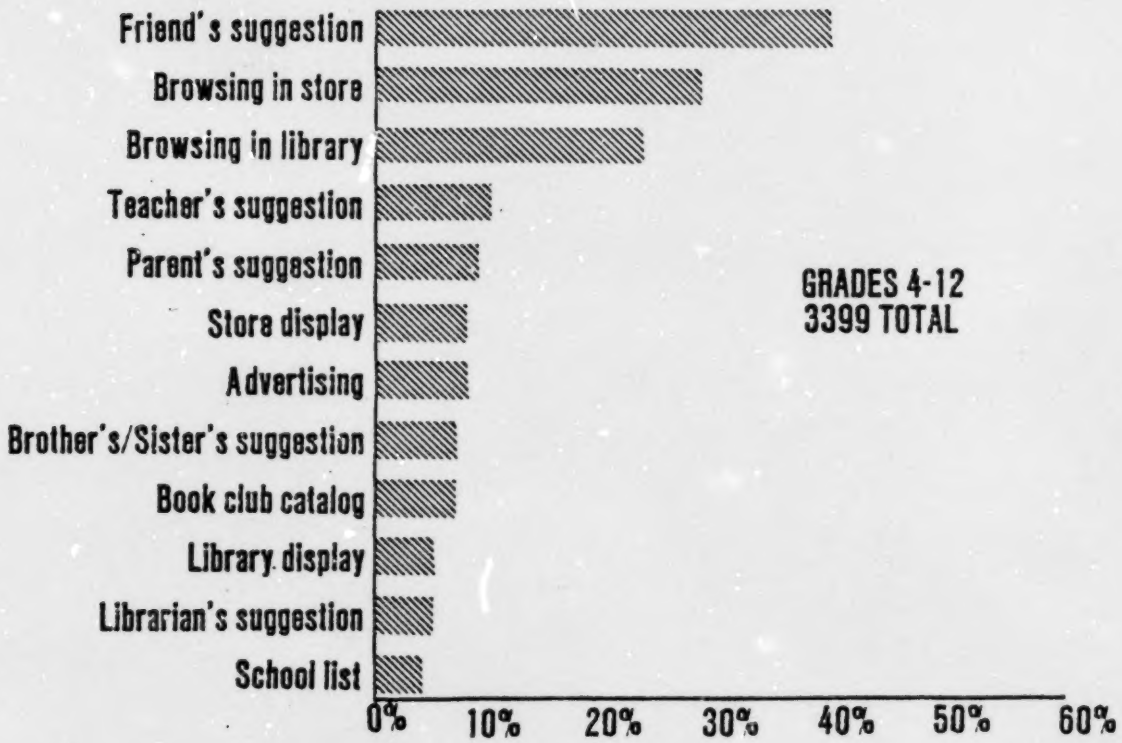
SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT NEW BOOKS TO READ



SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT NEW BOOKS TO READ



SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT NEW BOOKS TO READ



SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT NEW BOOKS TO READ	Grades 4-6			Grades 7-9			Grades 10-12		
	All students	Males	Females	All students	Males	Females	All students	Males	Females
Friend's suggestion	36	25	47	42	28	55	38	25	50
Browsing in store	17	20	14	28	32	25	31	29	33
Browsing in library	28	25	31	27	27	27	18	18	18
Teacher's suggestion	12	15	9	8	11	6	11	13	9
Parent's suggestion	9	10	7	8	10	5	10	8	11
Store display	6	8	5	7	10	5	8	9	7
Advertising	5	6	4	6	6	7	9	9	10
Brother's/sister's suggestion	6	4	7	8	7	9	8	7	9
Bookclub catalog	17	18	16	7	6	8	3	4	3
Library display	7	8	7	5	6	5	5	5	4
Librarian's suggestion	19	14	24	4	5	3	2	2	2
School list	3	4	2	6	6	6	3	4	2

Librarians--people whose major responsibility is to be familiar with books and students' reading interests--have almost no influence on the book choices of students except in the elementary grades where they rank third overall (third for boys and fifth for girls).

SOURCES OF BOOKS

The next chart shows that most students BUY the books they read, more so in grades 7-12 than at the elementary level.

SOURCES OF BOOKS	MALES	FEMALES	BOTH
BUY THEM	27	27	27
TOWN LIBRARY	21	21	21
SCHOOL LIBRARY	20	14	17
FRIEND	6	18	12
PARENTS	6	6	6
BROTHER/SISTER	5	5	5
GIFT	6	4	5
CLASSROOM LIBRARY	6	3	4

The town library is usually preferred over the school library. In the upper grades, boys are more likely to use the school library, and girls are more likely to exchange books with a friend. Relatively few students use classroom libraries as their main source of books, most likely because so few teachers have book collections in their classrooms, especially in the high schools.

PAPERBACKS VERSUS HARDBACKS

Do students have a preference for paperback or hardback books? The largest percentage in every grade did not express a preference for one or the other--an average of 53%. Those who did indicate a preference favored paperbacks. The greatest preference for paperbacks was from students in grades 7-9 where 44% preferred reading them, with 8th grade the highest (48%).

Overall, a far larger percentage of females preferred reading paperbacks, with the greatest percentage in grades 7-9, most especially in grade 8 where 58% of the 190 girls preferred them. Only about 5% of the students said they preferred reading hardback books, with more boys than girls (6% to 4%) indicating that preference.

It's quite a different story when it comes to buying a book. Then, approximately nine out of every ten students prefer a paperback, though fewer students--about 82%--in grades 4-6 prefer paperbacks. In all grades except fourth and fifth, more girls than boys (95% to 88%) said they choose to buy paperbacks over hardbacks.

BOOK PURCHASES

BOOKSTORES are students' main source for book purchases, followed (a long distance back) by LARGE DEPARTMENT STORES (of the K-mart variety).

SOURCES FOR BOOK PURCHASES

SOURCES	GRADE 4-6			GRADE7-9			GRADE10-12			ALL GRADES		
	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH
BOOK STORE	40	34	37	49	52	51	60	66	63	53	56	55
LARGE DEPT. STORE	13	13	13	11	11	11	13	13	13	12	12	12
SCHOOL BOOK CLUB	21	27	24	7	14	11	2	2	2	7	10	8
SCHOOL BOOK FAIR	8	13	10	12	9	10	4	2	3	7	6	7
PHARMACY	2	2	2	4	4	4	6	5	6	5	4	5

The bookstore gains importance as students mature. In the lower grades, boys are more likey than girls to prefer the bookstore, while the opposite is true in grades 7-12, though only by a slight margin. School book clubs and school book fairs show strength in the lower grades but decrease as students progress through the grades. That decrease, however, may be attributable more to the lack of teacher interest at the upper levels than to the lack of student interest.

BOOK CLUBS

In all grades, a total of 23% of the students said they had ordered a book through a book club during the previous year. The smallest percentage of purchasers was males in grade eleven (only 5%), while the largest percentage was females in grade five (88%). Except in grade four where more boys than girls ordered books, girls were far more likely than boys to use book clubs.

Elementary students were more likely than older students to order books through clubs. In grades 4-6, nearly six out of every ten students had ordered a book during the previous year, while in grades 7-9 only slighty more than one in four had done so, and only one in ten had used a club in the senior high school grades.

Rather than look for reasons in the minds and experiences of students as they mature, the reason might be that teachers in the upper grades tend not to get involved in book clubs, thus depriving students of a possible utilization of what had earlier been a valuable resource for them.

PLACE IN SCHOOL WHERE PAPERBACKS CAN BE BOUGHT

Approximately eight out of ten schools surveyed did not have a place, such as a school store, where students could purchase books for pleasure reading.

When students who did not have access to such a collection of books were asked if they would like to have such a place available, a considerable proportion replied affirmatively. As the chart below shows, nearly one-third of the students said they would like a place where they could buy paperback books, with more students in the lower grades being in favor of it than those in the higher grades, and with more females than males favoring it.

STUDENTS FAVORING A PLACE WHERE THEY CAN BUY PAPERBACKS

GRADE	MALES	FEMALES	BOTH
4-6	40	50	45
7-9	36	44	40
10-12	20	31	26
All	29	38	34

Favorable votes from females decreased from one out of every two in grades 4-6 to about one out of every three in grades 10-12. Favorable votes from boys decreased from 40% in grades 4-6 to half that in grades 10-12.

If a place, such as a school store, carried paperback books, this survey suggests that there would be a considerable number of students in most schools to support it, providing the store stocked the kinds of books most students like to read. In general, students indicated on this item similar responses to those they gave on a previous one about their favorite topics: for the most part they want books about romance, mystery, horror, sports, and teenage problems.

CHARACTERISTICS THAT APPEAL

When selecting books, the majority of students seems to be attracted most by the SUMMARY OF THE BOOK on the dust

CHARACTERISTICS OF A BOOK THAT ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ IT

	Males	Females	Both
Summary of story	30	57	44
Title	25	18	21
Cover Picture	21	12	16
Theme	13	9	11
Author	4	3	4
Quotes from Reviews	4	4	4
First Paragraph	2	2	2
Thickness	3	1	2
other	3	1	2

	Grades 4-6			Grades 7-9			Grades 10-12		
	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
Summary	30	48	39	35	58	47	26	59	44
Title	23	17	20	23	18	20	27	18	22
Cover	20	10	15	24	15	19	19	11	15
Theme	10	16	13	11	9	10	15	8	11
Author	5	7	6	5	3	4	4	3	3

jacket or cover. That is true of students in all grades except for males in grades ten and eleven where the TITLE of the book is slightly more important. The author's reputation, except perhaps for a very few superstars, does not seem to have very much influence on most students, having the most importance among younger readers. It also seems that the cover picture exerts a stronger influence among junior high school students--and among boys more than girls--than it does for either younger or older students.

NUMBER OF BOOKS OWNED

The average student in this survey owned in excess of 25 books. Because of the emphasis on material possessions in our society, one might logically expect students in the high school to personally own more books than students in the lower grades. Our survey shows the opposite. The size of students' personal book collections seemed to decrease as ages increased. This decrease parallels the decrease we see in the number of avid readers and the corresponding increase in the number of non-readers through the grades. Part of those decreases might be accounted for by the types of students whose experiences and attitudes we observed in this not tightly controlled sample. But because most of the other findings appear to be consistent with what we know from other studies as well as from trained observations, we suggest that these findings would not be significantly different for a more carefully controlled sample.

Keep in mind also that the number of books noted in this item is based on student' recollections (most likely even their guesses) of the number of books they possessed at the time of the survey. Some might underestimate, while others might overestimate. Nevertheless, the trends, if not the individual numbers, are revealing.

OWN MORE THAN 50 BOOKS

GRADE	MALES	FEMALES	BOTH
4-6	49	37	42
7-9	30	31	30
10-12	20	23	22
ALL	29	28	28

As the above chart shows, more than half of the boys in the elementary grades said they owned more than 50 books, while only 20% of them indicated that many in the high school. The decrease is not as precipitous for girls, though the percentage drops from 37 in the lower grades to 23 in the high school. It is nevertheless encouraging to know that such a good proportion of the students in our schools own so many books. In fact, 13% of the students in the survey said they owned in excess of 100 books--18% said so in grades 4-6, 14% in grades 7-9, and 10% in grades 10-12.

On the other hand, as the following chart shows, nearly one-fourth of all students--more males than females--said they owned fewer than 10 books. About 5% indicated that they owned none at all.

OWN FEWER THAN 10 BOOKS

GRADE	MALES	FEMALES	BOTH
4-6	15	14	15
7-9	23	15	19
10-12	36	23	29
ALL	27	18	23

This chart also reveals once again the marked decrease in the number of books as age increased. At the high school level, more than one out of every three boys owned fewer than 10 books, while less than one out of every four girls did so. (More than 10% of the high school males said they owned no books of their own, compared to only 3% of the girls at that level.)

AN EXTRA $8

We asked: If you had an extra $8.00, which one of the following would you probably buy? The following chart shows the responses.

WHAT TO BUY WITH $8.00

	Males	Females	Both
Record	50	56	53
3 Paperbacks	12	22	17
3 Magazines	16	11	13
Audio Tape	14	6	10
Hardcover Book	4	2	4
(Rent) Video Tape	4	1	3

It is not surprising how many kids would buy a record. And it is pleasing to see that such a large percentage would choose to buy paperback books. The breakdown by grade shows some interesting variations. Notice especially how the interest in records increases with age and how the interest in paperbacks decreases correspondingly, a rather large decrease in fact.

	Grades 4-6			Grades 7-9			Grades 10-12		
	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both
Record	39	50	44	48	54	52	55	60	50
3 Paperbacks	21	34	27	14	25	20	7	17	13
3 Magazines	10	6	8	16	8	12	17	15	16
Audio Tape	15	3	9	12	9	11	16	5	10
Hardcover Book	6	6	6	4	2	3	3	2	3
(Rent) Video Tape	9	2	6	5	<1	3	2	<1	1

RECORDS AND BOOKS PURCHASED DURING PREVIOUS SEMESTER

Eighty percent of the students in our survey reported buying one or more records and tapes during the previous (fall) semester. The typical student purchased between three and five records and tapes during that time, with students in the secondary levels purchasing more than students in the elementary grades.

NUMBER OF RECORDS AND TAPES PURCHASED

	0			1-2			3-5			6-10			11+		
GRADE	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
4-6	27	26	27	16	21	19	25	28	27	13	14	13	19	10	15
7-9	19	19	19	12	18	15	26	33	30	23	20	22	21	10	15
10-12	15	22	19	13	21	17	25	27	26	23	20	21	25	11	17
ALL	18	21	20	13	20	17	25	29	27	22	19	20	22	11	16

As the chart shows, boys generally bought more records and tapes than did girls. About 10% of the boys and 3% of the girls in the senior high school purchased more than twenty.

In contrast, the chart below indicates the percentages of students at each grade level who purchased books during that same period of time.

NUMBER OF BOOKS PURCHASED

	0			1-2			3-5			6-10			11+		
GRADE	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
4-6	13	13	13	13	11	12	21	25	23	26	21	23	27	30	28
7-9	33	24	28	20	18	19	23	28	26	13	19	16	11	11	11
10-12	44	33	38	22	24	23	19	26	23	8	12	10	6	5	6
ALL	36	27	31	20	20	20	21	27	24	12	16	14	11	11	11

Nearly one-third of the students indicated that they had purchased no books during that time period. Only 13% of both the males and the females in the elementary grades had not purchased a book as compared with 33% of the females and a whopping 44% of the males at the senior high school level. In the elementary grades, boys reported buying slightly more

books than girls did, but girls bought considerably more books than boys did at the higher grade levels.

Elementary students reported buying far more books than secondary students did. They bought an average of five to six books each, while the typical student at the junior high level bought between two and three books and the typical senior high school student bought fewer than two books.

At the positive end of the scale, one out of every four students surveyed indicated that they had purchased six or more books during that previous semester, with 11% of them purchasing more than ten books and 3% of both males and females purchasing more than twenty books.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

A question with a similar purpose asked stuidents how much they were "usually willing to spend to buy a book." While we expected most students to state a figure around $1.50 or so, only 16% of the students who responded to this item said they would spend less than $2.00 (and that figure included all those who said they wouldn't spend a cent for a book).

AMOUNT TO SPEND ON A BOOK

	Grades 4-6			Grades 7-9			Grades 10-12			All Grades		
	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
< 1.00	5	5	5	11	3	7	15	3	9	12	3	7
1-1.99	15	21	18	10	14	12	4	4	4	8	10	9
2-2.99	28	36	32	20	30	25	19	26	22	20	29	25
3-3.99	16	16	16	12	20	16	11	23	17	12	21	17
4-5.99	18	15	17	24	19	21	22	25	23	22	22	22
6-7.99	7	1	4	6	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	5
8-9.99	3	2	2	5	4	5	10	7	8	7	5	6
10+	8	4	6	13	5	9	14	8	11	13	7	9

The largest category of responses was $2.-$3, true. But fully 59% of the students said they were willing to spend

$3 or more and one out of every five said they would pay $6 or more for a book! In most cases, boys seemed willing to spend more than girls to buy a book, even though boys usually read less than girls.

DO YOUR PARENTS READ THE SAME BOOKS YOU READ?

Nearly four out of every ten students said their parents Never read the same books they do, while about one out of every three said their parents read the same books Once in a While, and another one out of four said Sometimes. Only about 5% of the students said their parents Usually read their books, and about 1% said they Always do. The only exception to that last figure is that, in grade 8, 3% of the boys said their parents Always read their books.

PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS WHOSE PARENTS READ THE SAME BOOK

Grade	Always			Usually			Sometimes			Once in a While			Never		
	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
4-6	<1	<1	<1	2	3	3	20	18	19	32	35	34	44	44	44
7-9	2	1	1	4	4	4	18	20	19	34	36	35	42	39	40
10-12	1	1	1	3	8	6	25	32	29	31	31	31	40	28	34
All	1	1	1	3	6	5	22	26	24	32	33	33	42	34	38

With an increase in age, there is not much decrease in the number of male responses in the Never category, though there is a sharp decrease in that category for females at the high school level. (The change is most noticeable in grades 11 and 12.) In a corresponding manner, there are obvious increases in the females' responses in the Usually and Sometimes categories. In comcomparison, the increase in male responses in the Sometimes category at the high school level is considerably smaller.

The increase in what appears to be parental interest in students' reading in the upper grades may not be that at all. Rather, if a greater proportion of the parents of high school students is reading the same books as their children, it may be because their kids have simply caught up to the adults' level of reading (girls are usually ahead of boys, which would account for the larger increases in females' responses in the Sometimes category) and not that a greater proportion of adults has finally turned their attention to what their children are reading.

Overall, it appears that about 94% of the parents in our study usually did not read what their children read.

PARENTAL CENSORSHIP

Approximately one out of every five students reported that their parents had at some time disapproved of a book they were reading or wanted to read.

PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS REPORTING PARENTAL DISAPPROVAL

GRADE	MALES	FEMALES	BOTH
4	22	14	18
5	23	27	25
6	16	25	21
7	18	28	23
8	13	29	22
9	17	26	22
10	13	25	19
11	10	20	15
12	10	14	12

Except for grade four, where 22% of the boys and 14% of the girls reported an occurrence of disapproval, far more girls than boys indicates YES on this item in all other grades. The incidents for males were highest in grades four and five and lowest in the senior high school. While the incidents were slightly lower for girls in the senior high school than at other grade levels, the number of YES reports was steadily high (between 25% and 27%) for females in grades five through ten, with the greatest percentage in grade eight. In grades eight, ten, and eleven, parental warnings were reported by twice as many females as were cases reported by males.

It is not clear whether the higher number of incidents in the lower grades indicates an increase in censorship attempts in more recent years or if students in their later years simply forget earlier admonitions from parents.

The fact that girls read more than boys might account for some of the higher figures for females, but not all. Is the greater censorship of females' reading another indication of a double standard?

SELF-CENSORSHIP

When asked which of fourteen topics would offend them so much that they would stop reading the book, a surprising number of students indicated at least one of the topics. Many

of the students who checked one topic checked more than one, indicating a concern about a number of issues. For example, a student who checked SAD EVENTS was also likely to check UNHAPPY ENDINGS and DEATH.

SELF-CENSORSHIP

	GRADES 4-6			GRADES 7-9			GRADES 10-12			ALL		
	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH
NONE	37	30	33	38	44	41	38	48	43	38	44	41
HOMOSEXUALITY	22	25	23	32	18	25	34	17	25	32	19	25
CRITICISM OF RELIGION	18	22	20	19	18	18	16	17	16	17	18	18
USE OF GOD'S NAME	21	20	21	13	13	13	11	10	11	13	12	13
CRITICISM OF AMERICA	23	16	20	16	10	13	14	8	11	16	10	13
UNHAPPY ENDINGS	8	15	12	6	10	8	7	12	10	7	12	10
DRUG USE	19	22	20	10	10	10	6	5	5	9	9	9
VIOLENCE	8	24	16	4	9	7	3	11	7	4	12	8
DEATH	10	22	16	5	12	8	3	8	6	5	11	8

Only about 38% of the males said they were not offended by <u>any</u> of the topics; that percentage was consistent for males in all three grade level groupings. Not so for females. While a smaller percentage of females checked the NONE category in grades 4-6 (30%), girls seemed to engage in less self-censorship as they matured. In grades 7-9, 44% of the females checked NONE: that percentage increased to 48% in grades 10-12.

SELF-CENSORSHIP—MALES

GRADES 4-6		GRADES 7-9		GRADES 10-12	
CRITICISM OF AMERICA	23	HOMOSEXUALITY	32	HOMOSEXUALITY	34
HOMOSEXUALITY	22	CRITICISM OF RELIGION	19	CRITICISM OF RELIGION	16
USE OF GOD'S NAME	21	CRITICISM OF AMERICA	16	CRITICISM OF AMERICA	14
DRUG USE	19	USE OF GOD'S NAME	13	USE OF GOD'S NAME	11
CRITICISM OF RELIGION	18	RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES	12	RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES	11

SELF-CENSORSHIP—FEMALES

GRADES 4-6		GRADES 7-9		GRADES 10-12	
HOMOSEXUALTY	25	HOMOSEXUALITY	18	HOMOSEXUALITY	17
VIOLENCE	24	CRITICISM OF RELIGION	18	CRITICISM OF RELIGION	17
SEXUAL ACTS	23	USE OF GOD'S NAME	13	UNHAPPY ENDINGS	12
DEATH	22	DEATH	12	VIOLENCE	11
DRUG USE	22	SAD EVENTS	11	USE OF GOD'S NAME	10
CRITICISM OF RELIGION	22				

The topic that engendered the greatest number of negative responses from both sexes at all grade levels was HOMOSEXUALITY. Essentially one out of every four students said they woud stop reading a book if they encountered homosexuality in it, with the percentages for males being considerably higher than that for females in the upper grades. In grades 4-6, 25% of the girls and 22% of the boys checked that topic. But that changed in grades 7-9 where 18% of the girls and 32% of the boys indicated HOMOSEXUALITY. In the senior high school, it changed slightly to 17% for girl's and 34% for boys.

The next three most prominent topics to which students objected were CRITICISM OF RELIGION (about 18% overall, for both males and females), USE OF GOD'S NAME (13% overall), and CRTICISM OF AMERICA (about 13% overall, but higher for boys than for girls). The latter two topics were more strongly objected to in the elementary grades.

Those topics were followed by UNHAPPY ENDINGS (10% overall, with more girls than boys being bothered by that), DRUG USE (9% overall, but with much higher levels of objection in the elementary grades and much lower--5%--in the high school), and VIOLENCE (8%) overall, but with girls being almost three times as likely as boys to check that topic--e.g., 3% of the males and 11% of the females in the high school.

In addition, though the number of students checking some of the other topics was relatively low, it seems significant to note that girls were nearly twice as likely as boys to be bothered by DEATH, SEX, SAD EVENTS, and "DIRTY" LANGUAGE, while males seemed more likely to be bothered by RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES described in books.

CONCLUSION

As was stated in the introduction, there are numerous comparisons that can still be made with the enormous amount of data in our files. Much of it will have to wait for the availability of more time and money, unfortunately. But there is obviously much we have been able to see from the findings presented in the previous pages. In several places we have not only drawn conclusions that the data indicate, but we have also made inferences about what some of these findings imply about young people, about teachers, about parents, and about what we offer students in our English and reading classes in Connecticut. Readers might wish to take issue with some of those statements; others might prefer to draw their own conclusions. For those who wish to think about these findings beyond this last page, there is plenty of room for further interpretations.